

## SCHOOL DAYS IN PHOENIX

As we remember them

By members of the Phoenix Historical Society and friends

The old school remembered by most was a two story brick building, built around 1910 that was located where the grade school is currently. In the 1930's and 40's the first through eighth grade were upstairs and the high school was downstairs. There was also a small one story building in the corner of the property called the "the shack". This was the original high school building used in the 1920's. In the 30's and 40's, music lessons were held there and some other classes. After a new high school was built, in the 1950's the shack became the cafeteria. The old brick building was torn down in 1972.

In an email Dorothy Claflin received from Charity Williams Small, Charity remembered: Looking back at our Phoenix grade school experiences, first through eight grades, I realize that we had an excellent education. We had wonderful teachers and for the most part really loved them. Rhoda (her sister) remembers the gentleness of Marie Prescott. I remember the enthusiasm of Edith Thompson who knew how to keep third graders involved and interested. There were rewards for us such as the wonderful dolls house for the girls.

We all looked forward to our year with Gladys Sloan who never failed to disappoint us. She was known for certain projects for which we could hardly wait. At Christmas we anticipated making cards, though my year, 1942, paper was destined for the War and we had to use toilet paper on which to print our linoleum blocks. For another project she somehow managed to find large pieces of paper on which we could draw and color our own versions of historical wonders. My masterpiece was the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. It was terrible. We learned to paint on glass and my poor parents had to hang my idea of a duck. I think I was trying to imitate the painting of the "Goose Girl".

What we really looked forward to was Gladys's expertise in string puppet making. These were no simple hand puppets. First we made paper mache heads, a skill I remembered when my own children were small. My head was supposed to be that of a princess but she had such a big nose and garish, hot pink skin tone that she was an ugly duckling who would never emerge into the vision of loveliness I had in mind. Still, I thought she was wonderful. We were also responsible for the bodies and learned to anchor metal weights where the strings would attach at the puppet's joints. This was a fairly difficult process but I had made doll clothes and managed a blue dress and finished the project. Unfortunately, this sixth grade ran out of time and we could never produce a puppet show. I kept the "Princess" for many years.

You would think that the only aspects of that year I remember were the art projects but I know that Gladys was a superb teacher and that this was a significant year in our intellectual development. She had the utmost respect of our parents. We should not forget either that the Sloans at that time lived through the anxiety of having a son off to war.

Perhaps it is the eighth grade I think of most often. Normally the eighth grade was taught by a man. Discipline can be difficult among eighth graders and teachers at that level were often expected to teach math to the upper grades. A Mr. Starr, for example had taught us math in the sixth grade.

No men were available for our eighth grade. They were needed in the military and when September came, no one had been hired. Our classes during the War were large, sometimes swelled by the influx of soldiers' families at Camp White. Tight housing meant that some families were housed as far away as Phoenix.

At the very last moment Kathryn Stancliffe was hired. I cannot remember if she used her married name Denzer or her maiden name Dietrich but certainly not Stancliffe. (She wasn't a Stancliffe yet). She was a familiar figure in Phoenix as was her sister Leah Dietrich Stringer. It

is my impression that Kathryn had not had much teachers' training yet and I'm not sure she had finished her degree. She had been to college and was perhaps close to finishing. In any case, she had not expected to take over this boisterous class.

We had survived what we thought was a tough seventh grade under "Old Lady Norcross", another really excellent teacher who simply did not put up with our nonsense. She surprised us by announcing her engagement and leaving the school. We just thought she was too old to get married when in truth, she may have been in her late thirties or early forties. We rose to the occasion and thanks to Gladys Sloan's help gave Miss Norcross a shower.

We all knew Kathryn Dietrich later Stancliffe and she knew all of us. Off we started, ready to test her. The year was a series of pranks. It could be as simple as burping loudly after lunch. It got a little more daring when after having been told to clean up the room for an open house, we took an undershirt used to clean blackboards and draped it over a torso used to explain human anatomy. Charlie Walker and Paul Betz disappeared one day and were later discovered hiding on the shelves in the cloak room behind the pull-down doors. This could have gone unobserved except that Charlie got stuck and needed help getting down. Anything could provoke paroxysm of laughter. When Tom Sloan let out a sob after a poignant ending to a Zane Grey's "Riders of the Purple Sage" which Kathryn read to us, the class went berserk.

There was a lot of pressure on Kathryn that year because eighth graders had to pass certain state or county exams. Math was beginning to get more complex. We were generally misbehaving and Kathryn announced to the class one day that we were giving her a heart attack. She sent two of the boys to the teachers' lounge to bring the cot there into our classroom. This was placed in front of the room. She lay down and finished the day before more or less subdued kids. She took sick leave for two weeks and a substitute was hired who tolerated no nonsense and taught us the math we needed.

Patriotism was in the air. There were positive things about that. Competing with the seventh grade we gathered tin cans, keys, discarded tools, any metal we could find, to deposit in a huge pile in front of the room. Whichever class gathered the heaviest amount would get a half-day off. This was a wonderful challenge, though in truth, we would not have minded if the seventh grade had won because after the departure of Miss Norcross, a truly unpleasant teacher was hired. We felt sorry for the seventh grade.

Esprit de corps helped our class. We were so enthusiastic we decided to have a spring style show for the other grades. Models would wear bathing suits – in this case the boys would model them. We actually found a number of old fashioned suits and pulled the show off.

Perhaps the boys took this esprit de corps too much to heart. Late that spring most of the boys were late returning after lunch. After they sat down, we began to notice an overwhelming smell of garlic. The large windows were opened but to no avail. The garlic was overwhelming and Kathryn had little choice but to send us all home.

The next day began quietly enough. After lunch we all sat down and Kathryn pulled from her desk a paper bag. We watched expectantly as she called most of the boys up to the front of the room. A few seventh grade boys were added to the line in front of us. Then she handed out whole fresh garlics and ordered each boy to eat all of them. The results were predictable as boy after boy turned green and left the room. Both the seventh and eighth graders were all sent home.

Did we learn anything? Indeed we did. Kathryn took us through requirements for a civic course we had to pass. She had a lot of interest in the workings of the government and taught us a great deal and of course, later became mayor. She loved to read and shared this love with us. Reading to eighth graders probably is no longer done but she had a lovely, lilting voice and we never wanted her to stop reading. She enjoyed history and sparked our interest. Paul Betz became very knowledgeable in history and shared some of his interest. Kathryn went on to teach science and became a very successful and highly respected teacher. I wonder if she ever knew,

despite our shenanigans, how much we really loved her. When reminded of that year she would say, "I'll never forget it!"

(The years Charity went to school in Phoenix were 1936 though 1944)

Dorothy Claflin remembered Tomilina Cook wearing wooden shoes and chasing Paul Betz around the room, "clomp, clomp, clomp".

Nannette remembered being in Mrs. Sloan's sixth grade class and making puppets. She said the class was fortunate enough to have a puppet show which they called "Rumpilstillskin". Everyone in the class made puppets and the puppets all had arm strings. They wrote the play in three acts. When they performed the play she remembered it was such fun. She and Dorothy Claflin also remembered Mrs. Sloan as a motherly person.

Dorothy Claflin and Nannette remembered Mrs. Edith Thompson as one of there favorites. She introduced the class to Japan and all kinds of other stuff. (Mrs. Thompson's daughter had been in Japan). They also remembered they had to learn poetry.

Nannette remembered Edith Fish. She was the music teacher but wasn't at Phoenix very long. Pat Popow remembered she also taught poetry and was very tough. Mrs. Fish had more than one class in her room, both the sixth and the seventh grade. Pat remembered being in the class with Wayne Turpin and some of the "bad" boys around town. She couldn't teach them anything. She kept saying "and if you kids don't shape up, I'm going to hang your heads out the window and let the birds peck your eyes out". Pat said she remembered that because she thought that was the meanest thing she ever heard a teacher say. Mrs. Fish also played the harmonica and would crack the kids on the wrists with it.

Nannette also remembered Mona Ferns. She was her and Dorothy's first grade teacher. Nannette remembered it was always a wonderful thing when you got to be the "turtle" monitor. Mrs. Ferns had a little turtle in a tray with a village and other things.

Mrs. Ferns was Stan's mother and when he started school in the first grade in 1936 she sent him to the Independence school. After that he transferred to Phoneix and spent another six years there until his mother started teaching in Prospect.

The Independence school and Fern Valley school were in a separate district. They were consolidated into the Phoenix district in the late 1940's.

Phyllis Murillo and several others remembered the day President Roosevelt declared war. Everyone in school went down by the nurses' room in the hall and listened to the radio. She also remembered everyone was scared as they heard the news.

Pat Popow read a story from the "Phoenician" dated November 2, 1938. The "Phoenician" was the old school newspaper that was printed twice a year. The story was about a Junior party. "The Junior class held a party at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Newbry (they were parents of some of the kids). The rooms were decorated in a Halloween motif. Those there besides the junior class were Mr. and Mrs. Newbry and Mr. and Mrs. Reedy (the principle), and Mrs. Thurman (a teacher). Parlor games were enjoyed such as "pick-up-stix" and "Lexicon" and "Murder". (Everyone wondered if a Junior class party today would be content with these games?)

Cecil Claflin remembers going to Phoenix high school for 3 years starting in 1939.

Stan Ferns remembered when the people from the railroad came to talk to all the kids about what they had been doing to the railroad. Stan remembered they gathered them all up because they said the kids were walking down the road and throwing rocks at the trains. One of the rocks went through a window and almost hit someone. Stan said he and Charlie Walker used to grease the tracks. They would take the grease that came off the trains and smear it on the rails. At night the freight trains would be coming up hill and hit the grease. They would then have to stop and wipe off the rails. Stan remembered the Pinkerton's came and lined up all the kids in the hall. Mr. Colver the principle was there too (he scared the kids anyway). Everyone was standing

there and everyone was scared. Charlie started crying. Paul Betz put his arm around Charlie and told him "everything will be alright".

Nannette remembered how exciting it was one time when there was a flood here and the irrigation ditch overflowed. She didn't have to go to school because the basement got flooded and the boilers wouldn't work. There was a cement ramp that went down into the basement.

Dorothy remembered that Nannette and Pat's uncle Milo was the custodian and used to haul the big logs down to the basement for the furnace. She also remembers that when the kids would walk up the tracks in the rain they would be wet when they got to school. Milo would let them go down to the basement and get dried out.

Nannette remembered one day when Pat sneaked by uncle Milo and out the back door and over to Mrs. Steadman's. Mrs. Steadman lived across the street. She was a delightful lady. She liked to have her tea and her cigarette and Pat was just starting to smoke. They were sitting there having a cup of tea and a cigarette and the phone rang. Mrs. Steadman answered the phone and said it was for Pat. Pat answered the phone. It was Mr. Barret the principle. He said "when you finish your cigarette you better get your butt back to school 'cause you're not near as smart as you think you are". Pat slumped back to school.

Phyllis remembered when Mr. Wilson picked Harold Schmelzer up by the back of his neck and the seat of his pants and threw him out of Study Hall for putting a tack in someone's seat.

Cecil remembered when he met the principle Floyd Valentine Barret at a stationary store when he came home from the war. Cecil had been a 'prisoner of war'. Mr. Barret told Cecil "I knew you were too awnrey for them to get ya". He was real glad to see Cecil.

Stan remembers Verl Moore used to get a spanking nearly every day. One of the teachers, he thinks Mrs. Prescott, would take him out in the hall and paddle his rear. It got to where he would come in laughing and she would come in crying. Stan also remembered when Verl started school. He was in his mom's class. The first day he sat on the cement wall and wouldn't go in. His mom went out and tried to bribe him. Finally she talked him into coming in. She bribed him with chewing gum. He said ok I'll come in but I'm not staying.

Nannette recalled the May Day celebrations at school. There would be sack races, ball games, a May pole and celebrating all day long. Everyone would make flower baskets and put them on friends and neighbors doors. The celebrations stopped when May Day turned into a giant Russian celebration.

Margaret Bolz Croly remembered when she went to school there were two classes in every grade. Each class had 30-35 students. The first day of school you would get there early so you could go into the class you wanted to be in. That was the class you stayed in the rest of the year.

Margaret, later a teacher at Phoenix sites Edith Thompson and Gladys Sloan as her mentors. She also remembers that Kathryn Stancliff was her eighth grade teacher. Kathryn was also Mayor the same year. Margaret remembers that she was one of Kathryn's college studies.

Stan remembers that after the war some of the military men would start teaching. All you had to do was get them talking about their war experiences and they would forget about what they were teaching.

Dorothy remembers Mr. Chamberlain the coach. He was at Phoenix one year. He made the boys learn to dance and they had to wear tuxedos. He was going to put some "class" into these people. He left and everyone went back to being themselves.

Nannette remembers that she and Phyllis were in the same grade. They had a wonderful teacher in the eighth grade named John Meyers. He was so handsome. That year he got engaged and was teased all year long. Mr. Myers taught at Phoenix for several years and later became principle.

Phyllis remembers that same year they moved some little 3<sup>rd</sup> grade desks into the room and she and Ronnie Robins and Fred Furry had to sit in them. She also remembers Mr. Meyers made the kids march. She couldn't learn to march very well and couldn't make square corners.

Dorothy Cotton remembers she also had Gladys Sloan as her sixth grade teacher in 1956. She was the same wonderful teacher she had been several years earlier.

Some of the Superintendents and Principals we remember at Phoenix are: Mr. Barret, Mr. Pete, Mr. James, and Mr. Skipworth, and Mr. Myers

Other teachers remembered were: Mabel Sims, Roscoe Larson, and Mrs. Morrison.